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## **Law and Order Committee meets with Tohajiilee Chapter to discuss creation of cross-commissions agreement with Bernalillo County**

*Navajo Police Department and Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office also give input*

TOHAJIILEE, N.M. – The Law and Order Committee on July 30 met with officials from Tohajiilee Chapter, the Navajo Nation Police Department, and the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office to discuss the chapter's request to move forward with the establishment of a cross-commissions agreement with Bernalillo county law enforcement.

According to chapter president Raymond Secatero, such an agreement would increase the visibility of law enforcement officers, which he says is needed in his community to help deter criminal activity and provide additional protection.

Vandalism and speeding on the main road into the community of Tohajiilee from Interstate 40 were cited as major concerns.

"The cross-commissions agreement is important because if something happens here in Tohajiilee, and if Navajo Nation police is not here, then Bernalillo County deputies can be called on to respond to the situation," said Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie.

The agreement would give county deputies the authority to enforce laws and make arrests on the reservation, said Delegate Yazzie, and would also give Navajo police officers the authority to arrest law violators who are non-Indian.

Bernalillo County Undersheriff Ron Paiz delivered a message from Sheriff Dan Houston stating that he is in favor of having a cross-commissions agreement established between the county and the Navajo Nation.

Undersheriff Paiz, along with Captain Greg Rees, assured the committee and chapter officials that once an agreement is in place, there would be no abuses of authority from county deputies, particularly when it comes to making arrests.

The cross-commissioning of county deputies will mean there will be more law enforcement officers available in the area to respond more quickly to a call for assistance.

Currently, the Navajo police department is short-staffed, said Capt. Steve Nelson, who oversees the Crownpoint District in New Mexico.

For example, it might take upwards of two hours to respond to a call in Tohajiilee because the only on-duty officers patrolling the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation might be hundreds of miles away in another Navajo community addressing a situation there.

In the meantime, Undersheriff Paiz said if Navajo police officers in the Tohajiilee area need assistance to neutralize a situation, all they need to do is contact the sheriff's office. County deputies will be deployed.

"Just call. We'll be here, and we'll give you any type of assistance that we can provide," said Undersheriff Paiz.

After all parties voiced approval for the formation of a cross-commissions agreement, several directives were made.

The Navajo Nation Department of Justice will soon be contacted to begin working on the new agreement.

The committee requested for Tohajiilee Chapter to produce a resolution favoring the agreement, and also requested for a letter from Sheriff Houston stating that he was amenable to having an agreement in place with the nation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd thanked Tohajiilee Chapter officials for bringing their concerns to the forefront.

Delegate Shepherd then turned to Undersheriff Paiz and Capt. Rees, and said, "We are looking forward to working with the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office, and having you out here working with our people, as well."

In approximately one month, the committee plans to hold another meeting at Tohajiilee Chapter where they intend to decide which council delegate will sponsor legislation to approve a Memorandum of Agreement with Bernalillo County.

Tohajiilee Chapter, located approximately thirty-five miles west of the city of Albuquerque, is one of three satellite Navajo communities.

Last year, Navajo police responded to approximately 1,300 criminal calls in Tohajiilee. From January 2012 to now, approximately 641 criminal calls have been made, said Capt. Nelson.

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